

## **COVID-19 update from the New Jersey Medical Examiner Office- April 2020**

The aim of these guidelines is to accurately document the cause of death while allowing for expedient disposition of the body.

- All deaths in cases that have a confirmed positive COVID-19 test, and where COVID-19 is considered to be the underlying cause of death, do not need to be reported to the Medical Examiner's Office unless the case falls under the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner for any other reason (e.g. death within 24 hours of admission to a hospital, or the death is deemed suspicious or unnatural)
- Patients who presented with respiratory symptoms/ fever and diagnosed with a pneumonia, in which the COVID-19 tests are pending, should have the death certificate completed by the treating physician, listing the cause of death as "Pending COVID-19 testing". The body can be released for burial and a paper amendment should be completed and sent to OVSR updating the cause of death once test results are received.
- In cases where a resident exhibited symptoms for COVID-19 but was never tested and later dies at a LTCF, if another resident tested positive in the same LTCF, the case can be released. The treating physician can sign the death certificate, listing the underlying cause of death as: "Probable COVID-19"
- If the patient had exhibited symptoms for COVID-19 but was never tested, and there were no confirmed cases of COVID-19 at the same facility, the ME should treat the case as a facilitated release, and have the ME personnel attend the scene to collect a nasopharyngeal swab to submit for COVID-19 testing
- Unless there is some other reason that would require the case to be reported to the ME, these cases do not need to be reported to the ME. In this situation, the body should not be placed on hold awaiting the results. Deaths where COVID-19 tests are pending but the cause of death has been determined to be unrelated to COVID-19 infection do not need to be reported to the MEO
- NJ Health Department is recommending that if there are other known cases of COVID-19 within the same Long-Term Care Facilities (LTCF), and other residents exhibit COVID-19 symptoms, these residents do not need to be tested, since this information would not affect the public health management at the facility